

Jolting us out of our complacency about grammar rules

PERHAPS I, of all people, really have no right to position myself as any kind of “grammar cop,” especially given that my writing style could best be described as “chatty casual” or perhaps, “purposefully plebian.”

Still, a few irritating words keep cropping up repeatedly on the local TV news and they are really starting to get under my skin. (The words, not the news people. See how imperfect my command of English is, already?)

First of all, I’ve been following, with a certain amount of sadness and more than a bit of outrage, the inquiry into the death of Howard Hyde, the mentally ill man who died while in police custody after being jolted with a Taser.

I’m not insensitive to the gravity of that case. But allow me to be superficial and point out that there’s something annoying about the coverage. Night after night, I keep hearing reporters refer to the fact that Mr. Hyde was repeatedly ‘tased.’

Here’s the thing. The noun Taser began as an acronym. According to the company’s website, the product’s inventor was supposedly a fan of a book called Tom Swift and his Electric Rifle and therefore, rather ridiculously in my opinion, chose to create the acronym TASER to name his invention. First of all, shouldn’t the name have become TSAHER if that story is even remotely true?

But besides that, my feeling is that it makes no sense to “verbify” the word, as if to say that a Taser is a “doer of tasing.” Unfortunately, that doofus who interrupted John Kerry’s speech a couple of years ago screamed “Don’t tase me, bro!” in such a hilariously melodramatic way that we were all forced to watch it repeatedly on YouTube. So really, I blame him for the ubiquitousness of the verb “tase” now.

Regrettably, there’s no clear right or wrong here. Canadian Press style appears to come down on the side of “Tasered.” But my online go-to gram-

DON'T GET ME STARTED



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mar guru, Grammar Girl, actually comes down on the side of “tase.” We both think the parallel argument is the use of the word “laser,” (since it was originally an acronym as well) but both she and the Oxford English dictionary suggest it’s OK to use the verb “lase,” and I would argue that I would never go out and get my eyes “lased.”

I guess my other beef about the Taser thing is that there’s just no consistency. The same reporter will say “tased” and “Tasered” in the same report, seconds apart. Shouldn’t a reporter be obliged to at least pick one?

I’ve also noticed an awful lot of TV news stories lately on the topic of “infastructure” (sic). I guess that’s like “infrastructure,” but maybe it’s for babies. Those little infants obviously do need their own roads, schools and prisons. Definitely, prisons. I mean, some of those babies are just so bad.

And my other little grammatical gripe is not for reporters but for people who like to post comments about the news online. If you, dear poster, are suggesting that something just wasn’t done right, the phrase is “could have” or “would have” or “should have,” which can be shortened to “should’ve,” etc. Not “should of.” Not “could of.” Not “would of.”

It’s worth paying attention to, because if our infastructure included real grammar police, you might of got tased for that.

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